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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
24 December 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Political Status of Vice President Juan Lechin

1. Vice President Lechin's prestige probably suffered as a result of his recent capitulation to the government's demands that he order dissident miners to release the 21 hostages they were holding. His initial support of the miners' tactics almost certainly has demolished whatever prospects Lechin previously had for wresting the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement's (MNR) presidential nomination from President Victor Paz Estenssoro at the party's 17-24 January convention.

2. Even before the recent crisis Lechin's formidable power position had been gradually eroded by shrewd political maneuverings of President Paz. While the Vice President was away serving as ambassador to Rome, Paz replaced key pro-Lechin peasant chiefs, labor leaders, and cabinet and MNR functionaries with people demonstrably loyal to himself. Paz was also notably successful in building a well-knit political machine and in winning the support of many party "fence straddlers." Basically President Paz probably commands more extensive grass roots support among the Bolivian people than does Lechin. This is especially so among the politically important peasants who have been the primary beneficiaries of the many social and economic reforms instituted by Paz over a decade ago.

3. Nevertheless, the politically and economically powerful tin miners' union, the basis of Lechin's power, remains loyal to the Vice President as do many Bolivian leftist-extremists. Lechin, also may recoup much of the support which he may have lost as a result of his capitulation among his regular followers in the ruling MNR and in most anti-government sectors of the Bolivian labor movement.

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4. Between now and the MNR convention it is conceivable that Lechin might attempt a reconciliation with Paz in order to try to hold on to his vice presidential post. It is more likely, however, that Lechin will continue in his seemingly futile struggle to dislodge Paz, seeking the presidential nomination for himself. President Paz will almost certainly be able to control the party's forthcoming convention and assure his own renomination.

5. If Lechin is completely repudiated at the convention he may either initiate an armed insurrection against Paz [redacted]

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[redacted] or withdraw completely from the MNR and establish a "popular front" political party. The latter course is more probable. If he makes such a move Lechin probably could count on political support ranging from leftist-extremist groups to disgruntled factions within right wing parties. The cohesive factor among these disparate groups would be their mutual enmity toward Paz. The Bolivian propensity for frequently shifting political alliances, however, would seem to militate against Lechin's ability to bring them together into an organization powerful enough to defeat the Paz-MNR machine.

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